



The Rise of South Africa's Peace Diplomacy Practice in the Post-Apartheid Era——From the Aspect of Niche Diplomacy

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Abstract. After the abolition of apartheid in 1994, South Africa actively participated in global governance and began to play an increasingly important role in the international community. The paper analyzes South Africa's peace diplomacy in the post-apartheid era through a case study approach. South Africa, as a middle power, has adopted the strategy of “niche diplomacy” and has chosen the area of peace diplomacy as the focus of development. Specifically, this article examines the competence base of South Africa's development of peace diplomacy, reviews the development of South Africa's peace diplomacy practice, and analyzes the need for South Africa to develop peace diplomacy. The paper concludes that South Africa aims to use the international influence gained by South Africa through peace diplomacy to spread to other diplomatic fields, thus enhancing South Africa's national image in general, gaining a voice in more international issues, and thus better promoting its national interests.

Keywords: Niche Diplomacy, Peace Diplomacy, South Africa.

1 Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, the bipolar pattern collapsed, an increasing number of countries began to play an important role in the international community, and the trend of multi-polarization in the world has been strengthening. South Africa (SA), as a large African country, has also gradually started to play an increasingly important role in the international community since the abolition of the apartheid system in 1994, which has attracted widespread attention in the world. As a medium-sized country in the world, what diplomatic strategies South Africa has implemented in the post-apartheid era to help build its national image and increase its national influence is a topic worth exploring. However, there are relatively few studies on this issue in the academic field, and most of the research results are focused on traditional diplomacy. After reviewing the information, the author found that the role of South Africa in the emerging diplomatic field in recent years should not be underestimated. This paper selects South Africa's “peace diplomacy” as an area for analysis.

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From the aspect of Niche Diplomacy, the paper uses the case study approach to analyze SA as a middle power, the development and the necessity of its peace diplomacy due to the critical security situation in Africa, as well as the overall effect and benefits for South Africa's diplomacy. To be specific, capitalizing on its comparative advantage in military strength and taking into account the critical security situation in the African region, South Africa has chosen to focus on peace diplomacy by actively participating in peacekeeping operations and using multilateral mechanisms to resolve regional conflicts in Africa, thus projecting an image of the country as an active defender of regional security and order. Having gained a certain degree of international influence in the area of security issues, South Africa intends to extend this influence to other areas, contributing to the overall progress of the country's diplomacy.

2 Niche Diplomacy

The academic concept of "niche diplomacy" is a new concept that emerged from the introduction of "niche marketing" in business management to the field of international relations. Niche marketing in business management is defined as the activity of selling products or services to a niche market ^[1] where a tiny number of people purchase a certain good that the majority of people do not, especially if it is high quality and profitable ^[2]. Small and medium-sized companies usually adopt this strategy to become experts in a particular less competitive area so as to form their own competitive edge and brand influence.

The end of the Cold War marks the collapse of the bipolar system since when international affairs were no longer dominated by the superpowers alone, and small and medium-sized countries began to play a greater role in the international community. In line with this reality, the diplomatic practices of these countries began to gain widespread attention from the academic community, and the concept of "niche diplomacy" was introduced. In the 1990s, former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans first raised the concept of "niche diplomacy" in analyzing Australia's foreign policy ^[3]. Similar to the principles of niche marketing strategy in business management, niche diplomacy refers to a country's foreign policy that it concentrates resources on a few specific international issues, areas, or activities to make itself a major participant or even leader in those areas, through which it may increase its influence around the world and power of discourse on more global issues ^[3, 4].

Niche diplomacy is a diplomatic tool unique to the middle power states. This is because middle powers are relatively weak compared to the great powers and superpowers and are not strong enough to make a difference on all global agendas, so they have to specialize in a few areas to gain greater international influence and thus a voice on more issues. Niche diplomacy is also less common for smaller countries, as their national strength is too weak to play a significant role in any international issues.

3 South Africa's Capacity Base for Peace Diplomacy

3.1 The Concept of Peace Diplomacy

This article draws on the definition of the concept of 'peace diplomacy' given by the scholar Antoni van Nieuwkerk. "Peace diplomacy" refers to a country's involvement in international tasks of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding [5]. Peacemaking means diplomatic intervention in the form of mediation or negotiation with a country in conflict to help it restore peace. Peacekeeping is the multinational military or police peacekeeping operation dispatched by the UN Security Council or other regional multilateral organizations and generally includes elements such as truce monitoring and protection of civilians. Peacebuilding refers to efforts such as post-war reconstruction and the resumption of economic and social development. Peace diplomacy is also a process by which a country demonstrates its soft power and international influence.

3.2 South Africa's Peace Diplomacy Competence Foundation

SA as a Middle Power. Niche diplomacy is a diplomatic tool unique to middle powers, which is because middle powers are not as powerful as large countries and cannot play a significant role in almost all areas of the international agenda but can only choose a few specific agenda areas to pour resources into to build their strengths and discourse.

South Africa is clearly a middle power. In terms of economic indicators, according to the latest statistics from the World Bank, South Africa's GDP in 2021 was 419.015 billion US dollars, ranking 31st in the world, while the country's GDP per capita in 2021 was 7055 US dollars, ranking 86th in the world [6]. Looking at the GNI data indicators, South Africa ranked 36th in the world with a GNI of 368.861 billion US dollars in 2021 and 96th in the world with a GNI per capita of 6,530 US dollars in 2021 [6]. In terms of national military strength, South Africa is ranked in the upper-middle range of the world. The Global Firepower Ranking, published annually by the Global Firepower Website, is one of the most authoritative rankings of national military power in the world. According to data released by the site in 2023, South Africa's national military strength is ranked 33rd in the world [7]. In terms of intrinsic country attributes, South Africa is ranked 24th in the world with a land area of 1,213,090.0 square kilometers, while its population in 2021 was 59,392,000, also ranked 24th in the world [6]. In terms of national socio-economic development, the World Development Indicators (WDI) compiled by the World Bank and the Human Development Index (HDI) compiled and measured by the UN Development Program are two important indicators of the level of economic and social development of countries around the world. South Africa's HDI index in 2021 is 0.713 and the HDI tier is HIGH, which is in the middle of the world [8].

Apparently, South Africa is in the middle or upper middle of the world in terms of several important indicators of national strength and can be presumed to be a medium power.

SA's Competitive Military Edge in Africa. Although South Africa is in the middle of the world in terms of military power, it has a military advantage on the continent

because most African countries have weaker military power. As a country's military capability is its foundation to practice peace diplomacy, it is reasonable and sensible for South Africa to devote more resources to developing peace diplomacy, as this is an area where niche diplomatic strategies may have significant leverage.

A country's overall military strength can be inferred from more granular indicators such as the number of armed forces personnel, government military expenditure, and the number of arms imports and exports. According to the latest statistics, South Africa has about 65,300 active military personnel, ranking 7th in sub-Saharan Africa, behind South Sudan (185,000), Nigeria (143,000), Ethiopia (138,000), Democratic Republic of Congo (134,300), Angola (107,000), and Sudan (104,300) ^[9].

In terms of military expenditure, South Africa's total military spending in 2021 is 3,265.6 million US dollars, ranking it as the second largest country in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Nigeria (4,466.4 million US dollars) in the first place and well above Kenya (1,113.3 million US dollars), which is in third place ^[10]. As for the statistics of the military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, South Africa's military spending is only 0.9% of its GDP in 2021, ranking 34th among sub-Saharan African countries, lower than Kenya (1.12%) and Nigeria (0.97%), which are also large regional countries, and far lower than the world's powerhouses such as the United States (3.48%), the United Kingdom (2.22%), France (1.95%), and China (1.74%) ^[10]. In terms of military spending as a percentage of total government spending, South Africa's military spending accounts for only 3% of its total government spending in 2021, also ranking 34th among sub-Saharan African countries, and this level is also far below the above-mentioned large countries ^[10]. The above data indicate that South Africa's military force building and socio-economic development are in a healthy balance and that the country's future economic development is likely to continue to strongly support the expansion of its military capabilities.

In terms of arms transactions, the TIV data system developed by SIPRI is now the world's most recognized indicator for measuring the volume of international transfers of conventional arms. The data show that the total value of SA's conventional arms exports in 2021 and 2022 is 89 TIV and 48 TIV, respectively, with an average annual export value of 89.4 TIV in the past five years, while Nigeria, which is also a large country in sub-Saharan Africa, has only 2 TIV and 3 TIV in 2021 and 2022, with an average annual export value of 2.5 TIV ^[11]. As for the regional powers in North Africa, Egypt had only 41 TIV of arms exports in both 2021 and 2022, and Morocco had only 21 TIV of arms exports in 2022 ^[11]. In terms of arms imports, South Africa imported 30 TIV of arms in 2022 ^[11]. Other large regional countries, such as Nigeria, imported 261 TIV and 54 TIV of arms in 2021 and 2022, respectively, with an average annual import of 98 TIV over the last five years, and Egypt imported even more arms, with an average annual import of 1,237.2 TIV over the last five years ^[11]. The above data can be found that, compared with other large African countries, South Africa is able to provide more arms exports to foreign countries, while the number of arms imports is relatively less, indicating that the country's weapons and equipment production capacity is relatively strong compared with other African countries.

4 South Africa's Peace Diplomacy Practice in the Post-Apartheid Era

4.1 Identity Transition of SA's Diplomacy

The changes in South Africa's political identity brought about by the country's political transformation in the 1990s laid an important foundation for the practice of South African peace diplomacy.

Before 1994, when apartheid was practiced in South Africa, the country was a "white enclave" with strong ties to the West under the administration of the National Party (NP) rather than a truly African country and adopted a policy of defending white interests in both domestic and foreign affairs ^[12]. In diplomacy, the apartheid regime saw the African national liberation movement as a threat and intervened armed in the national liberation movements of its neighboring countries, creating a state of hostility with other African countries and a threat to regional security. During this period, South Africa was largely isolated from the international community. For instance, it retains only its seat in the United Nations, but its rights and interests have been largely stripped away, and its membership in many international organizations such as the International Olympic Committee, Non-Aligned Movement, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has been suspended outright.

After the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, which represents the interests of the black community in South Africa, apartheid was completely abolished. South Africa's self-perception of identity shifts back to an African country and the ANC took a new direction in the country's foreign policy. In 1996, the government issued a policy paper stating that South Africa would henceforth prioritize the strengthening of diplomatic relations with African countries and cooperation with its African neighbors ^[13]. This change in self-perception of identity and the accompanying foreign policy shift laid an important foundation for South Africa's engagement with other African countries and were also an important cornerstone in the development of the country's regional peace diplomacy.

4.2 Progressive Development of SA's Peace Diplomacy

After a corresponding shift in its identity and diplomatic strategy, South Africa began to play an increasingly important role in regional peacekeeping.

During the first years of the ANC's rule, South Africa, which had only just completed its democratic transition, focused more on domestic issues and took a very cautious approach to regional peacekeeping. The May 1996 Defence White Paper and the accompanying 1998 Defence Review concluded that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) 's main duty was to uphold the nation's territorial integrity and thus that only a small amount of resources should be allocated for international peacekeeping operations ^[14]. It was not until 1997 that the South African Department of Foreign Affairs drafted the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions, which was approved by the Cabinet two years later, that it provided a set of methods for sending the SANDF overseas and recognized that participation in

peacekeeping operations was increasingly becoming a prerequisite for receiving international respectability and for establishing one's authority in discussions about conflict resolution and the reform of multilateral international organizations^[14]. Subsequently, the National Office for the Coordination of Peacekeeping Missions (NOCPM) was established to coordinate SA's participation in international peacekeeping operations and to provide political oversight of the operations^[14].

In 1998, South Africa sent its first post-apartheid peacekeeping force to Lesotho for operations. Subsequently, South Africa has sent peacekeeping troops to several countries, including Burundi, Sudan, Libya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. SANDF has made several outstanding contributions during its peacekeeping missions. The deployment of South African peacekeepers in Burundi successfully prevented the Rwandan genocide from spreading into Burundi, aided with Burundi's first democratic election campaign, and assisted in the integration of soldiers from Burundi's former Palipe-Hutu National Forces of Liberation (FNL) into the armed forces, intelligence services, and police^[5]. In the DRC, South Africa has contributed troops to two successive UN missions, MONUC and MONUSCO, and has provided expert advice on the restructuring, reorganization, and training of the FARDC^[14]. In addition, South Africa has provided professional logistical, engineering, medical, communications, and transportation support to the DRC, accommodating the multifaceted needs of recipient countries in peacekeeping support^[14].

In addition, South Africa has actively used multilateral mechanisms to participate in African security governance. After the end of apartheid, South Africa served three terms as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council from 2007 to 2008, 2011 to 2012, and 2019 to 2020. During its tenure, South Africa actively promoted the resolution of peace and security issues in Africa, especially the cooperation between the AU and the UN on peace and security issues in Africa. South Africa contributed to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolutions 1089 and 2033 on Africa and refined the direction of UN-AU cooperation in establishing joint expert panels, organizing joint high-level meetings, and facilitating policy coordination.

5 Critical Security Situation in Africa: Necessity of South Africa's Peace Diplomacy

The dire security situation in the African region is also one of the reasons why South Africa has chosen peace diplomacy as an area to practice niche diplomacy strategy. Africa is currently one of the most serious and complex regions in the world in terms of regional conflicts, where ethnic conflicts, political party conflicts, and interstate conflicts are constantly occurring, and terrorism and extremism are prevalent. In addition, the prevalence of infectious diseases, environmental degradation, and unreasonable economic development structures in Africa have exacerbated the negative impact of war and conflict on Africa, and thus the issue of peace and security in Africa has received widespread attention from the international community. If South Africa can give full play to its own advantages and actively promote the international agenda on solving African regional conflicts, it will gain more international influence in this field than

other less popular areas, thus improving the overall image of the country, gaining more say in more international issues, and better safeguarding its national interests.

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) has researched conflict and war in Africa. According to its newly released report, *Conflict Trends in Africa, 1989-2021*, the number of outbreaks of state-based conflicts in Africa generally showed an upward trend between 1989 and 2021, with 30 outbreaks of state-based conflicts in Africa throughout 2020, the highest number of outbreaks of state-based conflicts in Africa in 30 years ^[15]. The impact of terrorism on intra-African conflicts has also begun to gradually increase, reaching seven African countries that have fought terrorists from the Islamic State group in 2021 ^[15]. The number of battle-related deaths in Africa is also high, second only to the Americas, which has gradually increased in recent years, with 10,978 recorded in 2020, a figure that rises to 19,325 in 2021 ^[15]. For non-state conflicts, Africa is the region in the world where most such conflicts have erupted. Although the number of non-state conflict outbreaks has fluctuated in recent years, the overall trend remains upward, with 33 such conflicts breaking out in Africa in 2020, much higher than the number in other regions of the world ^[15].

6 Effects and Benefits of South Africa's Peace Diplomacy

In recent years, South Africa has played an increasingly indispensable role in the international arena by actively providing public goods to the African continent and the international community and participating in global governance, with the country's image and voice significantly enhanced compared to the apartheid era. Since the end of apartheid, SA has regained its membership in key international organizations such as the UN, the former OAU, and AU. Noticeably, South Africa served three terms as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, and played an active role in the AU, in which it promoted the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the African Standby Force (ASF), and other mechanisms. In addition, SA has also joined several important multilateral organizations, such as the G20, BRICS, IBSA, and G77. As a major African country, it has participated in a wide range of global and region-specific political, economic, and climate change issues.

It can be said that South Africa's peace diplomacy after the abolition of apartheid has helped the international community to see its efforts in maintaining regional and world peace and has helped it to change its former notorious image of racism and establish a new image of "conflict coordinator of the African continent" and "good citizen of the international community", which has thus to some degree helped South Africa gain a voice in more international issues.

7 Conclusion

Since the abolition of apartheid, South Africa's practice in peace diplomacy has been increasing, and peace diplomacy has gradually become an important aspect of South African diplomacy. The rise of peace diplomacy is reflected in the country's significant contributions to peacekeeping operations in the African region and its active use of

multilateral mechanisms to address African security issues. From the perspective of diplomatic strategy, the rise of South Africa's peace diplomacy reflects the application of the "niche diplomacy" strategy. As a middle power, given that it has a competitive edge in military competence and that Africa's security situation receives high international attention, South Africa has chosen the field of peace diplomacy as a "niche field", in which it has actively assumed international responsibilities and made substantial contributions. South Africa has successfully leveraged the influence obtained from this field to improve the overall image of the country, gain more say in more international issues, and better safeguard its national interests.

The contribution of this article is that it innovatively applies the theoretical knowledge of niche diplomacy to the analysis of South Africa's diplomatic strategy, reviews the history and the significance of South Africa's peace diplomacy practice since the abolition of apartheid, and presents a new elaboration and analysis of the theory of niche diplomacy using practical examples. Of course, there are shortcomings in this article. The article leaves out an in-depth analysis of the impact of South Africa's peace diplomacy on its national image, which will require further research and analysis in the future.

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